

Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen of the committee, thank you very much for taking the time to listen to my testimony today. My name is Kevin Hatman, and I am the public relations and media coordinator for the Michigan Humane Society, the oldest and largest animal welfare organization in the state.

I am here today to testify in support of Senate Bills 356, 357 and 358, which are much-needed tools in the fight against the cruelty and barbarism of animal fighting.

The Michigan Humane Society's Cruelty Investigation Department responds to more than 5,000 cases of animal abuse, cruelty and neglect in the cities of Detroit, Hamtramck and Highland Park each year. You may be familiar with some of our cruelty investigators from the Animal Planet series "Animal Cops: Detroit."

In that series, dramatic and often shocking cases of dogfighting raids, hoarder houses filled with huge numbers of animals, and abused and neglected dogs and cats are interspersed with happy endings – animals that found their forever home with a loving family. What's not seen, however, are the hours of painstaking work that goes into a dogfighting prosecution – the collaboration between law enforcement, MHS cruelty investigators and prosecutors – the necessary work that is done to bring those involved in this heinous activity to justice.

Unfortunately, the small group of men and women on the front lines of this fight are waging battle with a very limited arsenal.

Under current law, dogfighting is prosecuted under section 750.49 of the Michigan penal code. The penalties include fines, community service, loss of pet ownership, and up to four years in prison. However, the law is silent when it comes to the economics of dogfighting.

Dogfighting is big business. Magazines and web sites devoted to dogfighting detail the results of a match as if they were the results of last night's ballgame. Championships and trophies are awarded to animals that are considered to have the most tenacious fighting spirit, or those that end a fight in the most brutal way possible. And the money that changes hands betting on the outcome of a fight is often significant. We're talking tens of thousands of dollars in illegal gambling that may change hands for a single fight. This is a huge incentive for those who engage in dogfighting to continue this activity and continue this astonishing abuse of animals.

You may not have ever seen a dogfight. It is a difficult thing to watch. If you have dogs at home, they may have once encountered a dog with whom they had a disagreement – maybe there was some barking, some snarling, even a bit of snapping at each other.

That's not what a high-stakes dogfight is like.

These animals have been trained for maximum endurance and strength. In fact, they may be on steroids or other drugs. At the start of the fight, they rush toward their opponent and look for an opening on the most vulnerable parts of the other dog. Once one gains a slight advantage, they sink their teeth into the other animal with their powerful jaws, trying to rip and tear to cause maximum damage. These fights

can go on for a long, long time, as the strength slowly drains out one of the animals. When our investigators find the rings these fights took place in, they are lined with a thick layer of blood.

Some of you may be thinking that this isn't something that's happening in the areas you represent. While it's true that while dogfighting is most prevalent in urban areas, especially in the city of Detroit, this is something that can – and does – happen anywhere. You may have seen the recent bust of a dogfighting ring in Monroe County. More than two dozen people from across the United States were apprehended, and more than \$40,000 was taken as part of the investigation. Also seized were a number of drugs and a handgun.

Michigan cannot become a top destination for dogfighters.

Adoption of these bills would send a strong message that Michigan is getting tough on this abhorrent crime that puts everyone at risk. It would strengthen penalties by allowing for the prosecution of alleged dogfighters under Michigan's racketeering statutes, meaning longer prison times and higher fines. It would attack the economics of dogfighting by allowing the seizure and forfeiture of property associated with dogfighting, creating a strong disincentive for those who are currently profiting richly from this activity. Finally, the bills would also allow local authorities to declare these dogfighting venues a nuisance and close their doors for good.

These bills will give our laws the teeth they need to address this problem, and our law enforcement agencies and animal cruelty investigators the tools they need to bring these people to justice.

Thank you very much for your time this afternoon.